Value Pricing Sketch Plan for the
Town of Fort Myers Beach

This value pricing sketch plan for the Town of Fort Myers Beach has been developed in accordance with the application guidelines for the Value Pricing Pilot Program authorized by Section 1216 (a) of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) in the Federal Register Document from October 5, 1998, FR Document 98-26531. Included in this sketch plan are estimated expenses for each of the anticipated tasks. Note that these are cost estimates and will be refined in the detailed proposal. This plan outlines the pre-project activities necessary prior to project implementation. It is anticipated that an implementation project would commence after the completion of this study, in mid-2002.

1) CONGESTION PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED.

The Town of Fort Myers Beach is located on Estero Island in Lee County, Florida (see Figure 1). The town is served primarily by Estero Boulevard, a three-lane road running the entire length of the island. There is one lane in each direction and a two-way-left-turn lane in the center. This road is extremely congested, particularly during the winter months when tourists visit the area. Table 1 indicates the annual average daily traffic (AADT) near the northern end of Estero Boulevard.

Table 1: Daily Traffic on Estero Blvd.

Year	AADT
1996	16,900
1997	16,700
1998	16,700
1999	16,800
2000	16,700

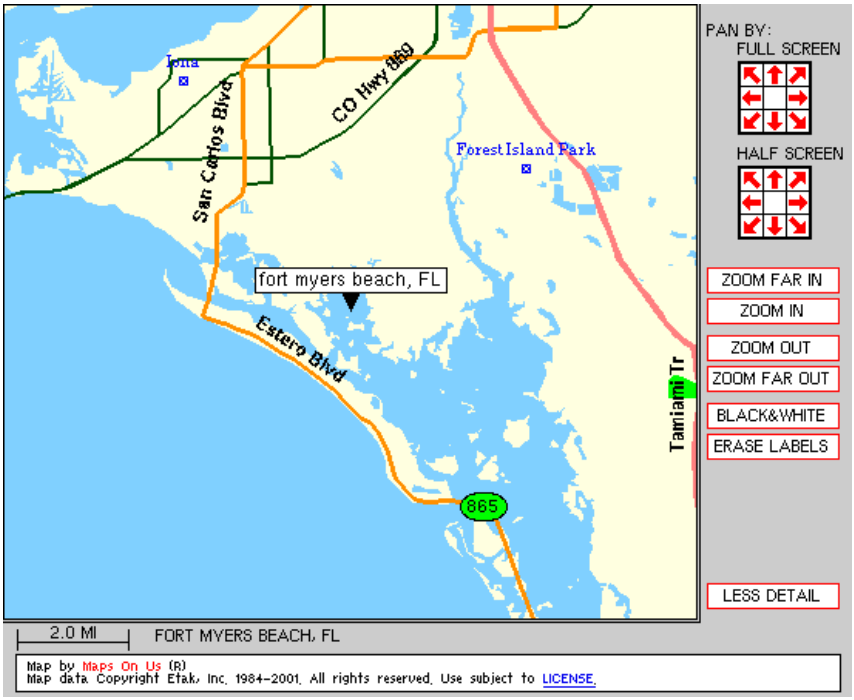

Figure 1: Town of Fort Myers Beach

In addition to vehicular traffic there are also a large number of pedestrians and bicyclists along the roadway leading to an overall level of service (LOS) of F on the northern end of the island. In fact, during peak season, the volume to capacity ratio exceeds 1.25. The congestion along this road impacts the ability of motorists to access the island. Most motorists traveling to the island use the Matanzas Pass Bridge at the north end of the island. This is a two-lane fixed span bridge with an AADT of 24,400 in 2000. This bridge operates at a LOS of E with volume to capacity ratio of 0.83. To cross this bridge during peak season drivers routinely wait over 30 minutes in traffic congestion that stretches 1.2 miles. To travel from the Matanzas Pass Bridge to the Big Carlos Pass Bridge (at the south end of the island, a 6 mile trip) can then take an additional 30 to 45 minutes. As mentioned previously, this congestion problem worsens during the winter months and lessens somewhat during the summer (see Figure 2).

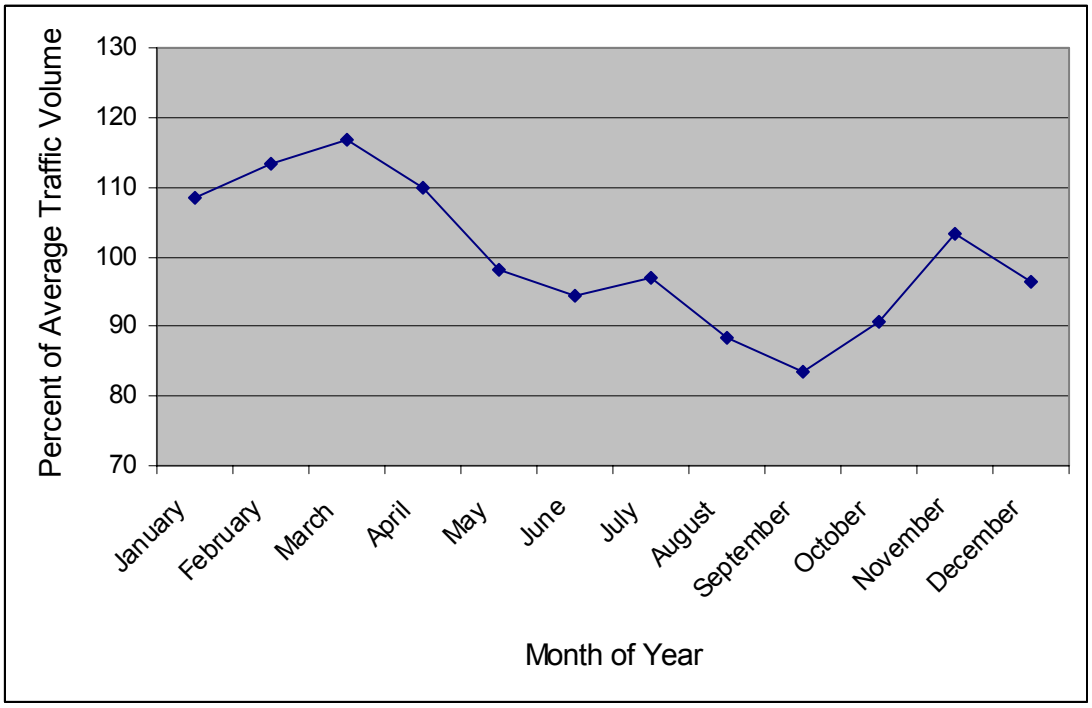

Figure 2: Monthly Traffic Pattern on Matanzas Pass Bridge

In Addition, traffic patterns on this road do not follow typical daily fluctuations. On Estero Boulevard, traffic generally peaks at 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. and does not have the traditional traffic peaks from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. (see Figure 3). Although this traffic pattern is not typical, it contains defined peak periods that incur excessive traffic congestion leading to the island and on the island. This proposed value pricing project would examine several methods to reduce this peak traffic problem. The primary method would include a variable toll at the two bridges leading onto the island.

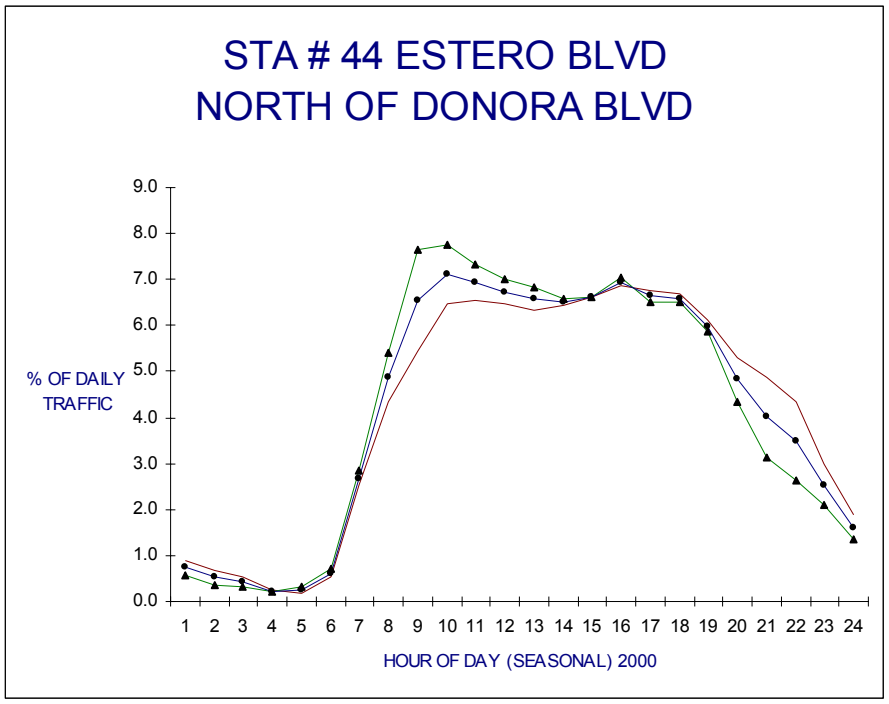

Figure 3: Daily Traffic Fluctuations on Estero Boulevard

2) NATURE OF PROPOSED PRICING PROJECT.

i) Proposed Pricing Project

This project involves implementation of a variable toll at newly constructed toll facilities at both the north and south approaches to the island. Similar to the toll rings of Norway, drivers would have to pay a toll to enter the Town of Fort Myers Beach. The toll would vary by time of day. The toll would be greatest during peak traffic periods and decrease during periods of loss traffic demand. There is also potential to vary the toll by the month of the year due to the seasonal variation in traffic congestion (see Figure 2). The toll differential would be set at a level to significantly reduce peak-period traffic. The exact range of toll rates would be determined during this pre-project study phase.

This sketch plan outlines the work necessary during this pre-project study phase of the Fort Myers Beach Variable Pricing Project. After completing this phase it is expected that an

implementation project based on the findings in the pre-project study would commence in mid-2002.

ii) Overall Project Goals

This project has two primary goals:

- Reduce traffic congestion leading to and in the Town of Fort Myers Beach.
- Study the impact of a variably priced toll on a previously untolled road. Also, study the impact of a toll ring around the Town of Fort Myers Beach.

Also outlined in Section 1, traffic congestion is a serious problem leading to and in the Town of Fort Myers Beach. This problem has worsened over the years with efforts to lessen the congestion largely unsuccessful. The physical constraints along the road make road widening economically impossible. Transit service has met with little success as drivers do not want to leave their automobile to board a transit vehicle stuck in the exact same traffic congestion.

Tolling the entrance to the Town of Fort Myers Beach can benefit congestion in a number of ways, including:

- Reduce the number of trips by drivers to the town, particularly during peak periods.
- Reduce the number of thru trips.
- Use toll revenues to improve transit service and make transit service more attractive. This may include ferry service from a park-and-ride lot north of the island to a beach on the island.
- With additional transit users, the need for parking on the island will be reduced. Due to the difficulties finding parking on the island, many drivers are forced to circle around their desired destination to find parking, causing additional congestion.

As with all Value Pricing Pilot Projects, an important goal is to evaluate the impacts of the project. This project is likely to provide several unique pieces of information. First, the project will implement a variable toll where no toll previously existed. The impact on time-of-day traffic volumes will be an important study finding. Additionally, this project will be the first toll

ring in North America, providing insight into how drivers in this hemisphere will react to a city surrounded by a variably-priced toll. Additional study plans are outlined in section 6.

iii) Facilities to be included

This project would focus on two toll facilities at either end of the Town of Fort Myers Beach (see Figure 1). All vehicles entering the Town of Fort Myers Beach must use one of these two facilities as these are the only land accesses to the island. Therefore, impacting these two facilities will impact traffic throughout the Town of Fort Myers Beach.

The variable toll would be applicable to all drivers. Exact toll rates would have to be developed during the pre-project study phase of this project. There is the potential to allow the use of LeeWay and/or SunPass transponders for toll collection. Also, frequent user discounts may be necessary to obtain support from town residents. These discounts could be developed in a similar fashion to the discounts offered at the Cape Coral and Midpoint Memorial Bridges. On those bridges, frequent users can purchase an electronic toll collection program that offers them a reduced toll on each trip. This toll is then further reduced for those drivers traveling during specific times of day (the variable pricing discount periods).

Revenues from this variable toll have many potential uses, including:

- An improved trolley service into and through the town.
- Improved parking facilities on the approaches to the island.
- Improvement of Estero Boulevard.
- Construction, maintenance, and operation of the toll facilities.
- A ferry service from the mainland to the island.

iv) Study and Project Timeline

At this stage it is extremely difficult to predict the exact schedule for this project. The implementation schedule will be developed during the pre-project study phase. The pre-project study phase will likely last 10 months and culminate in an implementation plan for the project.

3) ADDITIONAL SIGNATORIES AND PROJECT SUPPORTERS

This project will require the cooperation of several agencies. To begin, the Matanzas Pass Bridge is owned by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). For the project to proceed, FDOT would have to support a variable toll on this bridge or turn over the bridge to Lee County or the Town of Fort Myers Beach. We anticipate that FDOT will be interested in this project as it parallels one of FDOT's own strategies:

> "Manage the demand placed on transportation facilities through encouraging the use of transportation demand management techniques such as car pooling, flexible work schedules, trip reduction ordinances, congestion pricing and increased accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists."[1]

Additionally, support from the Lee County Department of Transportation (DOT) will be necessary since the County owns and maintains Estero Boulevard and Big Carlos Pass Bridge. Due to the extreme congestion along Estero Boulevard (volume is greater than the capacity of the roadway), there is a need to alleviate this congestion:

> "Fort Myers Beach….major road, Estero Boulevard, already operates at what is considered an unacceptable level of service in the winter."[2]

In the MPO meeting of June 22, 2001 the members of the MPO gave unanimous endorsement of the Town of Fort Myers Beach's application to the FHWA for this variable pricing study. The MPO consists of members from all governmental agencies in Lee County including:

- Lee County,
- City of Cape Coral,
- City of Fort Myers,
- City of Sanibel,
- City of Bonita Springs,
- Town of Fort Myers Beach, and
- the District Secretary of the Florida DOT sits on the board as a non-voting member.

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[1] Florida Department of Transportation, *2020 Florida Transportation Plan – 2000 Short Range Component*, February, 2000, p. 116.

[2] Town of Fort Myers Beach*, Comprehensive Plan – Transportation Element,* January, 1999, p. 7-24.

Support from the Town of Fort Myers Beach will also be necessary since that town will be directly impacted by the variable toll. The Town Council voted on April 17, 2001 to approve further study of tolls on the bridges to the island through this variable pricing grant application. Additionally, the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) supports variable pricing in the county, and continued coordination with the MPO will occur through Lee County's representatives on the MPO.

Due to the multi-jurisdictional and sensitive nature of this project a broad advisory committee will be assembled to help guide the project. Members invited to participate will include the MPO, FDOT District 1, the Town of Fort Myers Beach, the Fort Myers Beach chamber of commerce, Lee County DOT, FHWA, citizens groups, and representatives of the various cities in Lee County.

4) PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND EQUITY CONCERNS

The current Lee County Variable Pricing Project has enjoyed tremendous public acceptance, in part due to extensive marketing and public participation throughout the project. The public participation process for variable pricing has included a series of public meetings held specifically to introduce the variable pricing concept to the citizens of Lee County, telephone surveys, focus groups, surveys of LeeWay customers, roadside surveys, presentations to numerous civic associations, and presentations to the MPO and its Technical and Citizens Advisory Committees. Additionally, the project has enjoyed exceptionally strong coverage from the local media including two editorial endorsements. Finally, the citizens of Lee County have actually been able to participate in variable pricing, and significant changes in traffic patterns have occurred on facilities offering variable pricing. Surveys done in Lee County indicate that a very high percentage of bridge travelers (between 80 to 90 percent) know about the variable pricing program. Therefore, the public is well aware of variable pricing already. However, the current variable pricing project in Lee County involved a toll discount whereas this project involves implementation of a toll on a currently free bridge. Clearly, it will be more difficult to gain public support for this new project.

There are several important factors that make public support a strong possibility. First, Lee County residents have been exposed to the concept of variable tolls and are strongly supportive of the concept. Second, Lee County has experience in educating the public on this issue. Third, some of the toll revenue is planned for use on transit service to the island. This transit service would be economically priced to save users money. Fourth, drivers traveling to/from the island experience tremendous delays due to congestion (see Section 1). Reducing these congestion related delays would prove to be very positive and help this project gain significant support.

Although public support will be difficult to obtain, the above factors make it likely that the public will support the project. To obtain that support, a substantial public awareness campaign will be necessary during the early stages of this project. This would include focus groups, town hall meetings, and meeting with all local groups interested in hearing more about this project. During this period it will also be important to examine any equity concerns of those people who will be disproportionably impacted by this toll. During the pre-project study phase, ideas regarding toll rates and transit fares to overcome inequities in the program will be investigated.

5) LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY REQUIRED

As outlined above, several agencies (Lee County DOT, FDOT, and the Town of Fort Myers Beach) will need to approve this project. All of these agencies have verbally agreed that this study should proceed. The MPO and Town of Fort Myers Beach have stated their support on record in public meetings. Written support from FDOT will be obtained shortly.

6) PLANS FOR A PRE-PROJECT STUDY

During this pre-project study phase of this project, the goal will be to define a large number of project specifics. These include toll rates, exact location of toll plazas, additional parking prior to the toll plaza, transit routes, fares and schedules, transit priority lanes, ownership of toll facilities and bridges, and use of the toll revenue.

Due to the large number of unknowns, significant effort will be required during this pre-project study phase. To help gauge citizen reaction to various proposals a pair of focus groups will be undertaken during the early stage of this pre-project study. Next a survey of drivers on the island will be undertaken to get a larger indication of how the people most impacted by this toll rate will react to variable tolls. Historical traffic patterns will also be examined in order to develop a variable toll schedule. Delays caused by congestion will be recorded for comparison to delays once the toll is in place. These delays will be measured by undertaking multiple travel-time runs across the length of Estero Island and by measuring the queue lengths at both the north and south ends of the island three separate times. In addition to delays and queues approaching the Town of Fort Myers Beach it will be important to monitor changes in traffic levels approaching the nearby beaches of Sanibel Island and Bonita Springs. Transit ridership to and from the island will also be recorded to determine the impact of tolls on ridership.

A comprehensive parking study will be conducted to determine the feasibility and potential impact of:

- new remote parking lots near Estero Island and their appropriate pricing structure,
- island wide public parking rate changes and policies to reduce congestion.

Currently, residents and hotel guests generally park at their home/hotel for free. Visitors to the island generally must pay for parking.

7) PROJECT TASKS, TIMELINE, AND ESTIMATED COSTS

At this point in project development, only the pre-project study phase tasks, timeline, and costs can be estimated. It is expected that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will pay 80% of all costs and the Town of Fort Myers Beach will provide the required match of 20%. Table 2 indicates total costs, tasks, and timeline.

Table 2: Project Tasks, Timeline, & Estimated Costs

TASK	DESCRIPTION	DATE	COST
1	Prepare Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (revise as necessary at end of study)	September 2001 and May 2002	$25,000
2	Focus Groups (2)	October 2001 and January 2002	$30,000
3	Driver Survey (1)	February 2002	$67,000
4	Travel Time Runs (4)	September 2001 to May 2002	$10,000
5	Parking Analysis and Evaluation of Alternatives	October 2001 to June 2002	$100,000
6	Toll Evaluation and Toll Revenue Alternatives	September 2001 to June 2001	$55,000
7	Record Queue Length and Delay (4)	September 2001 to May 2002	$40,000
8	Traffic and Transit Data Analysis	September 2001 to June 2002	$30,000
9	Initial Public Awareness & Marketing Activities	September 2001 to June 2002	$125,000
10	Prepare Implementation Plan	May 2002	$50,000
11	Project Management[3]	September 2001 to June 2002	$150,000
	TOTAL	September 2001 to June 2002	$682,000

[3] This includes $40,000 for administrative costs for the various government agencies involved including LeeTran.